At Memorial Florists and Greenhouses in Appleton, Wis., a special round of Mother’s Day deliveries always goes out the Monday before the holiday, with the help of some very young “delivery” helpers. For three years, Bob Aykens, AAF, has partnered with local groups to sell Mother’s Day hanging baskets and gift cards through area schools, churches and other nonprofits. The organizations receive a percentage of each sale (about 30 to 40 percent, depending on the group and item), while Aykens is able to cover his costs and raise his profile among key demographics in town, including parents who are charmed by the sight of Junior hand-delivering a plant to mom.

“Once you’ve done it with one group, other organizations hear about it pretty quickly,” said Aykens, who started working with two organizations for Mother’s Day in 2011; this year, he’ll be delivering plants or cards to 12 groups. “It’s about name recognition for us.”

Aykens keeps the program streamlined (and delivery and labor costs in check) by staying organized. In February, he begins reaching out to groups and distributing personalized flyers and order forms that detail prices and sizes. The groups handle the orders themselves and then cut Memorial Florists one check, which Aykens picks up when he and his team deliver the orders — always early in the holiday week, to avoid conflict with other orders. (Those deliveries are often picture-worthy themselves, as the students hurry to unload the trucks at the school and feast their eyes on the many hanging baskets.) The plants are grown in-house at Memorial, which also factors favorably into Aykens’ cost equation, and the gift cards are strategically priced between $10 and $20; that way, Aykens can likely recover the 30 percent donation when the gift recipient comes into the store and inevitably spends more than the exact card price.

“It’s a good way to build relationships with schools and other groups,” said Aykens, who replicates the program at other times throughout the year, too — poinsettias for Christmas, mums for fall. “For the customer, a lot of times they’re spending about the same as they would be (on a Mother’s Day gift); plus, they’re supporting a cause that’s important to them.”

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**CUSTOM ASK**
Memorial Florists and Greenhouses uses customized order forms for Mother’s Day pre-sales through local organizations around Appleton, Wis.

**SIGNED, SEALED, DELIVERED** When Bob Aykens, AAF, and his team deliver Mother’s Day pre-orders to school the week before the holiday, they often have unloading help from students who are excited to bring their gifts home.
When Heather Waits of Bloomtastic wanted to promote a special on irises earlier this year, she emailed approximately 4,000 contacts. Then, she waited. “We didn’t get a single order,” she said. The next day, she promoted the special on Facebook to 1,466 fans, and received three orders in 10 minutes (another two came in later that day). That fast turnaround is perfect for Mother’s Day, when many customers wait (and wait and wait and wait) to order — and then need easy choices (read: don’t overwhelm late orderers with too many options). For Mother’s Day this year, Waits plans to “show two to three images of Mother’s Day-themed arrangements and a coupon code for $10 off in the text section” on Facebook. She’ll also post photos of easy-to-assemble flowering plants and novelty gift items.

> Allison Barto of Kati Mac Floral Designs recently helped residents of West Chester, Pa., shake off the long winter with a burst of spring — and 3-foot wooden tulips. Alongside her husband, who has a talent for woodworking and furniture construction, Barto turned her 6-by-11-foot window display into a whimsical beacon of good things to come, with the tulips (and wooden grass) sharing space with rustic-looking lanterns and more delicate items, including round and teardrop glass bubbles filled with air plants, decorative moss and tea lights, and affixed to the ceiling with fishing wire. Succulents and small houseplants grounded the display, which was just as pretty inside the shop as it was from the busy street. (The display area is about 3 feet deep.) Thanks to strategically placed lights — floodlights, overhead incandescent lights and LED flameless candles — the window was equally stop-in-your-tracks-worthy at night. “We see about 15,000 cars a day go by,” Barto said. “If they’re zipping by, it’s nice to have something in the window that’s bold and graphic.”

THE SKINNY ON MOMS

> Mother’s Day sales were up for about 50 percent of florists in 2013, according to the Society of American Florists’ spring holidays survey. About 31 percent of respondents said the holiday’s sales were flat, and around 18 percent saw a drop.

The holiday seems to have been especially good for a select group of small shops: Among florists with less than $300,000 in annual sales, around 13 percent saw an increase of 25 percent or more; 26 percent saw flat sales, representing the largest segment of that group. By comparison, 29 percent of shops with more than $1 million in annual sales reported increases in the 5%-to-9%-percent range (the largest segment for the group), and 14 percent saw gains of up to 4 percent.

What percentage of fresh product sales for Mother’s Day were:

- Fresh cut flowers
- Green plants
- Flowering plants

CUT ABOVE Taking into account answers from respondents of all sizes, florists reported that cut flowers made up about 78 percent of 2013 Mother’s Day sales, according to an SAF post-holiday survey. Source: SAF’s Spring Holidays Survey, emailed to 3,148 retailers on May 21, 2013. Response rate 8 percent.